DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 205 899 CS 006 193

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TITLE Nontraditional Strategies for Nontraditional Students.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 13p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (26th, New Orleans, LA, April 27-May 1, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Change; Change Strategies; Educational Resources; *Language Skills; *Learning Problems; *Nontraditional Students; Postsecondary Education; Reading Instruction; Self Concept; *Student Improvement; *Student Needs; Student Problems; *Study Skills

ABSTRACT

Noting that educators have progressed considerably in the development of instructional and institutional strategies for nontraditional students, this paper provides a chart summarizing possible solutions to the various problems of such students in postsecondary education. Dealing with both affective and cognitive domains, the chart lists areas of weakness common in nontraditional students, such as limited vocabulary, test anxiety, alienation, lack of direction, poor self-image, and poor study skills. For each weakness or problem area, a possible solution or suggested resource is offered. A bibliography lists resources that work well with the nontraditional student, including self-help and quick-reference materials. (RL)

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NONTRADITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Janice L. McIntyre

Please
Be ready to teach me
I am almost ready to learn
W. W. Merwin

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The poem, "The Piper" concludes with a request from an adult learner for assistance. The speaker of the poem has been seeking for "twenty years" avenues for "wisdom". Because of the problems of life, however, the speaker of the poem was unable to obtain such knowledge. Other activities prohibited the speaker from learning, and "it has taken me this long". He is now in that situation educators refer to as the "teachable moment". "Be ready to teach me" represents the plea that the nontraditional student makes to educators. They are in our institutions, ready to learn and we, as educators, are expected to be ready to teach and to offer assistance.

Educators have not always known how to handle such a request from the nontradtional student. Losak (Knoell, p. 35, 1973) has portrayed the situations of the nontraditional student and the academically unprepared as being the "Achilles heel of higher education." Adults are now attending post-secondary institutions in larger number than ever. They are expanding their awareness and the value of learning (Cross, 1974). New doors are being opened to populations of students who have never before had the opportunity of an advanced education. Our society has now expanded its "social consciousness" and the new populations of students attending schools are a reflection of progress in our society.

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The Nontraditional Defined

Currently, the nontraditional student is becoming so common in post secondary institutions, that one may wonder what makes such students "nontraditional". Throughout the literature, such a student is defined in several ways. Harcleroad (1971) describes such an individual as "having disadvantages stemming from low ability, low achievement, cultural or linguistic isolation, poverty, neglect or delinquency." Losak expands this definition to include any individual who does not meet the "established criteria for entrance into a desired course or program (Losak, 1974). Waterhouse defines the term of those who are not seventeen or eighteen years old and who come directly to college from the upper two-thirds of academic level in college prepartory classes. Waterhouse continues to state that the population of nontraditional students now represents the majority of the community college student body. The nontradtional student sees education as the opportunity for upward social mobility and is often enthusiastic about the academic setting. However, these serious deficiencies require that educators "be ready to teach me".

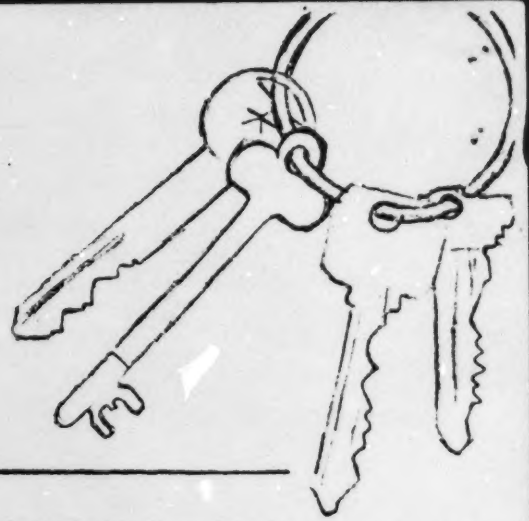
Nontraditional Problems

Academically, the nontraditional student is not ready for college-level course work. Typically, nontraditionals read at levels from the fourth to the ninth grades making them unable to handle college-level textbooks. Students have serious deficiencies in writing and math abilities, problem solving and critical thinking skills. The reason for these deficiencies are numerous: new populations attending college, grade inflation, poor scholastic backgrounds and lack of opportunity to pursue such learning (Roueche, 1978). Such students are a high risk and if the institution does not respond by offering assistance, the open door policy, in reality, becomes a "revolving door".

Affectively, many nontraditional students feel inferior and have a failure identity (Roueche, 1978). Luis Nieves in Coping on Campus discusses the attitudes nontradtional students develop with the academic setting. The student will either adopt a withdrawal, separation, assimilation or affirmation philosophies in relation to the institution. Often if the affirmation stance is not accepted, the individual may have feelings of powerlessness, worthlessness, alienation and often exhibit other inappropriate adaptive behavior (Roueche, 1978). Roueche continues to state that these students have little confidence in themselves and actively behave in ways that promote such failure.

Nontradtional Solutions

The following charts summarizing possible problems and solutions for the nontraditional student deal with both the affective and cognitive domains. These suggestions are by no means complete and the sensitivity and expertise of the instructor determines usefulness. References to published material may be found in the accompanying bibliography.



KEYS TO NONTRADITIONAL STRATEGIES

AFFECTIVE PROBLEMS

Self Image	Student "support" systems, use of buddy system, ethnic student union, class interaction
Procrastination and Motivation	Nieves, College Achievement Dyer's, Your Erroneous Zones career counseling, peer counseling
Lack of Direction	Nieves, College Achievement career counseling, peer counseling
Alienation	Nieves, College Achievement ethnic student union, peer counseling, class interaction
Scheduling	Nieves, College Achievement Pauk, p. 18-32 Lenz & Shaevitz, Facing the Realities
Test Anxiety	Biofeedback Morgan, How to Study Pauk, How to Study in College Millman, How to Take Tests

KEYS TO NONTRADITIONAL STRATEGIES

AFFECTIVE PROBLEMS (continued)

Domestic Relationships	Lenz & Shaevitz, So You Want to Go Back to School Apps - Study Skills
Appropriateness of Courses	Lenz & Shaevitz, So You Want to Go Back to School academic counseling
COGNITIVE PROBLEMS **Areas of Weakness**	**Possible Solutions**
Reading	Individualized diagnosis and remediation
Low Comprehension Speed	Reading for Understand - S.R.A. Miller, Reading Developing Efficiency, and Increasing Reading Efficiency
Weak Vocabulary	Davis, Basic Vocabulary Vocabulab - S.R.A. Sack-Yourman - Vocabulary Materials
Writing	Individualized diagnosis and remediation tutoring, peer proofreading, proofreading techniques
Spelling	Brown, Better Spelling
Grammar	Johnson, How to Achieve Competence in English Blumenthal, English 2200, 2600 and 3200
Listening	Listen and Read - McGraw-Hill a.v. practice sessions, summarization practice
Math	Computational Skills Developmental Kit-S.R.A. Individualized diagnosis and remediation tutoring

KEYS TO NONTRADITIONAL STRATEGIES

STUDY SKILLS Notetaking	Pauk, Cornell - Notetaking System
Retention, Concentration	Armstrong, Study Tips
Learning Styles	Cognitive Style Inventory - N.Y. State at Albany
Critical Thinking	R.F.U. Kits
Content Area Background	Instructor suggested reading lists tutoring

Conclusion

Educators have progressed a great deal in the last decade to develop both instructional and institutional strategies for the nontraditional student. The "Achilles heel" has no cure, only a remedy of instructor expertise, individualized techniques and sensitivity to the nontraditional problems.

BUTTER AND BOOP
WHAT'S THE MATTER, BUDDY?
IT'S MY TEACHER, SHE SAYS I'M A SLOW LEARNER.
THAT'S TOO BAD, BUDDY.
I'M NOT REALLY A SLOW LEARNER.
SHE JUST TEACHES TOO FAST.

The following sources work well with the nontraditional student. Many of these are self-help advisement and quick-reference sources for immediate assistance on academic problem areas.

Apps, Jerold W. Study Skills for Those Adults Returning to School. New York: McGraw Hill, 1978.

Armstrong, William H. Study Tips: How to Study Effectively and Get Better Grades. Woodbury, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1975.

Blumenthal, Joseph C. English 2200, 2600 & 3200 - Programmed Courses in Grammar and Usage. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1981.

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Davis, Nancy B. Basic Vocabulary Skills. New York: McGraw Hill, 1969.

Dyer, Wayne W. Your Erroneous Zones. New York: Avon Books, 1976.

Johnson, Eric W. How to Achieve Competence in English. New York: Bantam Books, 1976.

Langan, John. Reading and Study Skills. New York: McGraw Hill, 1978.

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Pauk, Walter. How to Study in College. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1974.

Pivar, William H. The Whole Earth Textbook: A Survival Manual for Students. Philadelphia, Pa: W. B. Saunders Company, 1979.

Sackheim, George I., Robins, Lewis. Programmed Mathematics for Nurses. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1974.

Saitz, Robert L. and Stieglitz Francine B. Ideas in English for Students of English as a Second Language. Cambridge: Winthrop Press, 1974.

Seese, William S. In Preparation for College Chemistry. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1974.

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Wood, Nancy. College Reading and Study Skills. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.